

The Social, Political and Economic Effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

By: Ambassador (R) Selim Yenel

A First Assessment

The coronavirus (COVID-19) that began to spread worldwide from China in early December 2019 and declared to be a pandemic on March 12th, 2020 is the most significant example of globalisation. In addition to the rapid spread of the virus due to the ease of transport and travel, today's communications made it possible for the world to become aware of the situation almost immediately. However, being aware and taking appropriate measures are different things. As the disease became known and began to spread, the opaque policies of those in authority caused misinformation and at times outright false messages to cause a negative impact. We have witnessed panic and sometimes indifference due to geographical distance. As the measures taken were late and doubts about their effectiveness grew, mistrust towards governments began. More worrying was the fact that in addition to the non-readiness of nations, the international community itself was unprepared. Although policies differed whether countries were democratic or authoritarian, the result did not prevent the spread of the virus. Despite the pronouncements of the World Health Organization on how to deal with the crisis, each country still took its own measures. Countries responded to the threat with quarantines, closure of borders, preventing international transportation, delaying or cancellations of sport and cultural events, among others. All these policies nevertheless failed to prevent the number of cases and deaths from increasing.

With the first measures as aviation stopped and borders began to close, the world economy and trade suffered greatly. As happens in all disasters, there were winners, and there were losers. However, it will take a long time for the world economy to recover. Although it is difficult to guess when this pandemic will end, it will. In any case we may already make some preliminary assessments.

Observations

- **The importance of transparency:** With the suppression of the truth and facts in certain countries, wild assertions and outright false and misleading news spread, causing unnecessary panic and making preventative measures ineffective. Even when information was provided many preferred to listen to hearsay and rumours. As the real situation came out, the damage to authority had already been done. Credibility suffered. It will be long lasting.
- **National and international measures:** The pandemic has shown that preparations for preventive measures within nations and cooperation among countries have been wanting.
- **Rate of Infection:** The COVID-19 has been observed to be spreading quicker and in a more expansive manner compared to other similar diseases.
- **Solidarity:** Each country acted alone and instead of providing assistance to neighbours they behaved selfishly. Even the European Union showed a lack of solidarity for its members.

- **Racist attitudes:** As the virus spread from China, racist and xenophobic attitudes were shown towards people of Asian descent and appearance, regardless of whether they are in fact from Asia.
- **Fragility of the economy and commerce:** The aviation sector was the first to be hit and tourism and its sub sectors like sportive and cultural events were affected negatively. The closure of borders hampered commerce. A chain reaction caused a downward spiral in almost all categories. Economic growth has stalled.
- **Information disorder:** Debate continues on the origin of how the virus came about. There is also a conflict of information on its treatment, which increases confusion on the correct course of action in preventing the further spread of the virus. There were those who exploited the situation through social media, causing increased disorientation. Experts had to struggle to find a voice.
- **Online work and education:** This is an area with a possible positive outcome. Employees began working online from their homes. Although this is not new, it has become a necessity. If this method becomes successful, the result maybe a new model of business. Workplaces may shrink, savings may develop and this might even have an additional positive effect on traffic. Needless to say, employees' rights should also be protected given the new circumstances. Although online education is already taking place, albeit sporadically, this may also increase and again have a positive side effect for future schooling.
- **Responsibilities of nations:** After the pandemic is brought under control, there will be a need for a general assessment and self criticism on what took place. China has a responsibility to explain in a transparent manner how the virus originated. The United Nations through the WHO also has an obligation to enforce nations to adhere to its preventive standards.

What should be done for the future?

COVID-19, with its global effects has been a new phenomenon confronting humanity. Mankind is at a turning point. There will be other natural or man made disasters to face in the future with local, regional and global repercussions. With the goal of "Health for Everyone", steps need to be taken to ensure synchronization and closer cooperation between international and intranational health agencies. In addition to solving the current pandemic, there are measures that can already be taken:

- **Preparation:** Countries should start preparing without delay for the next disaster. In addition to health issues, steps should be taken for matters, such as climate change or other possible disasters and these should be explained to the public.
- **Education:** In order to prevent panic or complacency, education should start at an early age to inform on how to respond and act during disasters. Society should be kept abreast of preparations and made ready to deal with any calamity.
- **Responsibility:** Authorities should act responsibly and transparently. Cases and deaths should not be hidden. Authorities should demonstrate that they are on top of things to establish trust. They should rely on experts and measures taken should be credible. Suppliers and users of social media need to act responsibly to prevent those who abuse the situation.
- **International response:** The UN General Assembly should organize a Special Session on global disasters and how to manage them. In this session, nations' actions and responsibilities including the concept of sovereignty should be discussed in detail. China should be held responsible and called upon to give an explanation on how this

GIFGRF

virus originated and why they were late to take measures. The United Nations should establish a mechanism with long-term monitoring policies in order to take swift action for achieving global cooperation. Finally, international financial institutions should start preparing economic packages to support those countries that suffered the most.

There will be much more dialogue on both the public health and other aspects of COVID-19. The important thing is to end this pandemic as soon as possible, overcome its consequences and be prepared for future disasters.